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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SINGAPORE 001047

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EFIN](#) [KCRM](#) [SN](#)
SUBJECT: SECRETARY CHERTOFF'S MEETINGS WITH DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER WONG KAN SENG

REF: SINGAPORE 1044

Classified By: A/DCM Laurent Charbonnet. Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

11. (SBU) Summary: During Secretary Michael Chertoff's March 29 and 30 meetings with Singapore Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng, the Secretary outlined the United States' approach to improving transportation security in ways which facilitate rather than hamper trade and proposed we expand cooperation on counterterrorism and law enforcement. He urged that Singapore and the United States conclude a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty and improve information sharing. The Secretary and DPM Wong also signed a letter of intent to

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expand cooperation in security-related science and technology. End summary.

12. (SBU) Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff visited Singapore from March 28-30. Accompanied by the Ambassador, he met with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng during an office call March 29 and luncheon the next day. Adam Isles, Counselor to the Secretary; Brian Besanceney, DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs; Paul Fujimura, DHS Director for Asia/Pacific and Economic/Political Counselor also attended the meetings. Rftel reports Secretary Chertoff's meetings with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, and Deputy Prime Minister S. Jayakumar.

Transportation Security

13. (SBU) Secretary Chertoff outlined the U.S. government's programs to improve transportation security by partnering with private enterprise and ensuring that increased security also had a positive impact on companies' and countries' bottom lines. Ultimately, the United States and Singapore are dependent on robust flows of legitimate people, goods and money: "We cannot destroy the systems we are trying to protect." Singapore -- as a major regional consolidation and transshipment port -- could actually increase its competitive advantage over other ports by fully implementing a tighter security system, which would entail improved knowledge about the contents of transhipped containers, technology to detect radiological and other hazardous materials and methods to

prevent tampering with cargo through the entire supply chain.

Shippers and ports that implement such systems could enjoy expedited treatment for the goods they send to the United States, thus making them more attractive to exporters. The United States wants to cooperate with Singapore in developing the technological means to improve security while facilitating trade, offered Secretary Chertoff. To this end, the Secretary hoped Singapore would push to expand the Megaports program, now beginning a trial period here. The Secretary and Minister Wong also signed a letter of intent to

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expand cooperation in security-related science and technology.

Law Enforcement Cooperation

14. (C) Secretary Chertoff pressed Wong on the need to conclude a bilateral Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), which would facilitate the sharing of evidence and testimony between law enforcement agencies in both countries. Wong took the point, but was non-committal. The Secretary and the Minister also discussed a number of other cooperative ventures to fight crime and terrorism. The Secretary proposed a test exchange of lookout-list data from each country, which respective law enforcement agencies could use to screen travelers. (Note: as called for in Homeland Security Presidential Directive 6. End note.) Wong agreed to have technical experts from both countries discuss this.

15. (SBU) Wong noted that Singapore would be publicly rolling out on March 31 its first biometric passport, which it would give to government-linked frequent travelers in a trial period. This was excellent progress, agreed Secretary Chertoff, though the introduction of fingerprint information in passports was a necessary next step. The United States

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hoped to work with Singapore to develop this capability. Wong agreed this was a good idea, but suggested working through a bigger organization, such as APEC, to get multilateral buy-in and common standards and protocols. When the Secretary noted that starting a project with a bigger group was always more complicated, Wong recommended Singapore and the United States undertake initial work with a country like Australia, with whom Singapore already was working to improve sharing of lost and stolen passport information.

Counterterrorism Cooperation

16. (C) Security agencies here and in the region have disrupted the JI structure and leadership but isolated JI elements remain active and new splinter groups have popped up, which operate semi-independently of previous al-Qa'ida and JI organizations, said Wong. Noting that authorities have detained some 300 JI members throughout Southeast Asia, Wong cautioned that al-Qa'ida-style radical ideology still resonates among some Muslim populations in the region. In addition to CT operations against individual terrorists, governments now must step up efforts to counter this ideology, particularly through improved education and teaching "correct" religious understanding. Operations against individual terrorists without countering the surrounding environment of radical ideology is "just catching ants," concluded Wong.

17. (C) Secretary Chertoff agreed that broad ideological work to counter extremism was necessary and hoped the United States could tap Singapore's insights on this. Singapore has been studying, said Wong, how "normal people" become radicalized and capable of undertaking terrorist acts. Since April 2004, Singaporean Islamic scholars had been counseling Singapore's nearly 40 terrorist detainees and had found that their extremely weak and faulty understandings of Islam had

made them susceptible to persuasion and recruiting by extremists.

18. (C) Singapore had purposefully taken a "soft approach" with its detainees, MHA staff explained, which included psychological and religious counseling, taking care of their families and holding out the hope of rehabilitation and a return to society. It is "difficult to assess the success of this program," said Wong, but concerns about inciting the local Muslim community and "steeling" it against the government had compelled this tack. In this context, Wong raised Singapore's concerns with the handling of the video testimony from Singapore detainee Faiz Bafana, which U.S. prosecutors used in the Moussaoui trial. Faiz Bafana, according to Wong, claimed U.S. law enforcement officials had guaranteed to him they would only use the testimony in closed court. It had appeared in open court and his family in Singapore now were concerned for their safety (note: because of potential reprisals). This incident had made Faiz reluctant to cooperate further with U.S. officials, claimed Wong. Secretary Chertoff countered that he was very familiar with the Moussaoui case and could confirm that U.S. officials would not have made such guarantees. Wong cited the instance "not as a complaint," but as an illustration of the need to establish mechanisms to avoid future misunderstandings.

19. (C) Wong and his staff provided synopses of the situations in, and counterterrorism cooperation with, other Southeast Asian countries. Key countries of concern are Indonesia and the Philippines.

-- Indonesia: CT cooperation with Indonesia was improving, with the GOS (among others) providing CT training to the Indonesian police. The country, however, remained an important operating environment for terrorists. Indonesia had arrested some 200 JI members, but had released many after short detentions and no rehabilitation. Indonesia still harbors a ready pool of bombers and accomplices, said Wong's staff, and new splinter groups had formed. Given political pressures, Singapore was concerned about the sustainability of the GOI's CT efforts.

-- Philippines: Singapore finds CT cooperation with the

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Philippines frustrating because of overlapping and uncoordinated government agencies and the tendency of sensitive CT intelligence to quickly find its way into the press. Mindanao remains a serious concern; trained foreign operatives work side-by-side with local terrorists. The Abu Sayyaf Group had shown a "marked increase in capabilities," and close association is clear between Abu Sayyaf, the JI, the Moro Independence Liberation Front and the Rajah Solaiman Movement.

-- Malaysia: Singapore and Malaysian intelligence and law enforcement agencies cooperate well, and Malaysia has "a good handle on terrorism," though Sabah is still problematic. Singapore is concerned that problems and people can spill into Malaysia from southern Thailand and that, potentially, Malaysian radicals could go to southern Thailand to foment trouble.

-- Thailand: CT training and intelligence exchanges continue between Singapore and Thailand, though the GOS is not satisfied with the Thai government's handling of the situation in the south: the local population's attitudes toward the government are hardening and the "militants are becoming more sophisticated." If this situation is not resolved, what is currently a purely local issue could become an international problem.

110. (U) The Secretary's party has cleared this message.
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